

## Catalog Search Results / Too much or too little?

### **Goals**

Students will understand the purpose of the library catalog and the scope of its contents. They will respond critically and analytically to the results of their searches. They will recognize and identify problems with the results, and apply techniques to modify their searches to improve the results.

### **Outcomes**

- Students will appraise the results of catalog searches, and identify up to three problems with the results in order to decide how to improve their searches.
- Students will choose and apply at least three techniques to modify their catalog searches in order to improve the results.
- Students will document how these techniques improved their search results, and show at least three examples.

### **Materials**

- Sample catalog searches (prepared beforehand) that will provide convenient yet topically relevant examples for the demonstration. Sample searches should show typical problems with basic catalog searches, such as no results at all, thousands of irrelevant results, items in many languages, or lots of false hits because of common names (Dickinson), terms (security), or homonyms (aids, tanks, cell).
- Classroom with a data projector, written assignments, handouts (optional)

**Time required:** minimum of 20 minutes, maximum of 30 minutes

### **Lesson**

Introduction (5 min.) What is the library catalog? What does it include? What does it not include? Why is the catalog a good place to begin research? What are some typical experiences students have when they search the catalog? (Examples: no results, too many results, confusing results, irrelevant results)

Demonstration (15 min.) Demonstrate several sample searches, and prompt the students to assess the results and explain why they are less than satisfactory. Based on the problems identified, demonstrate techniques to modify the searches. (Examples: use limit options, search specific fields, combine terms, browse terms, use truncation). Select several sample sources and identify evidence in them that the search was more successful.

Explain the assignment, and, if time allows (10 min.) have students begin in class.

### **Assignment/Assessment**

Students will perform an assigned keyword search in the library catalog.  
Students will list up to three problems with their initial results, giving examples.  
Students will identify three techniques to refine, expand, or improve their search.  
Students will apply these techniques, and document with examples the new results.  
Students will write down the most confusing aspect of the lesson, and the most helpful.